2: Flannery E-5 (1940-1948) 1953
NQ13 Gros Ventre NQ13

842 thers wash such clothes and wear them again right after delivery—and they have a lot more babies now than they used to have, too."

[163] Coming Daylight said that formerly most women had only two or three children,—at most five,—and that some had none at all. Yet in the "old days" the population was large. Singer mentioned that although a man with several wives might have one as favorite, this would not make any difference. Each wife would have one or two children; no one of them would have a great many.[1]

These two old women, and our older men informants as well, were firmly convinced that "medicinal" contraceptives accounted for the small families. The old woman said: "Lots of women took medicine. There are roots for that [contraception]. Women who do not want children say, as an excuse, that one cannot keep things in order if there are children about. Not everybody had this kind of medicine, and one had to pay a high price for it—sometimes two or three horses. If a man were the owner of this type of medicine, he might demand in payment one of the other wives of the husband who obtained the medicine from him. If you take this kind of medicine you have to abide by certain rules. You must not let anyone who has children wear your robe; never sit on the bare ground; never hold an infant; don't sit on anyone's else bedding; above all, don't have intercourse with anyone other than your husband. If you break any of these rules you will conceive right away."

[837] To illustrate this point, one woman told about her cousin's wife who had taken medicine to prevent her having children. While her husband was away, she "threw in" with another man and became pregnant. Some women hesitated to take this kind of medicine because if a woman then became pregnant her husband would suspect infidelity, even though the wife had remained chaste but had "broken one of the other rules." Singer said that she would

[145] [1] This is confirmed by Denig, who was among the northern plains tribes for 20 years and was himself married to an Assiniboine. He makes the following observations, p. 513: (1) Not more than two out of five children live till youth is passed; (2) two to five children is the average and seven or eight of rare occurrence; (3) a woman is old at 35 and seldom healthy, menopause occurs at 40 or earlier, the usual period of child-bearing is 18 to 35, although a few start bearing at 15.

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NQ13 Gros. Ventre NQ13

CHAPTER X

OLD AGE AND DEATH

It is the opinion of the now aged Gros Ventres that the proportion of old persons was much greater in the past than it has been since they have taken up the white man's ways; and further, that the aged then retained their health and vigor to a greater degree.[1] One old woman stated that when she was young, there used to be many old people, but that they died off when there were no more buffalo. She added: "People lived to a good old age on the things that the Supreme Being provided,—roots, wild vegetables and fruits, dried meats and berries. In those days, too, they drank broth instead of tea and coffee. Old folks didn't lose their teeth then, although even young girls do nowadays. Their teeth eventually got worn down, but they seldom pulled them. In fact, if an old person should lose a tooth, he thought it was awful and was sure that he was ready for the grave. Furthermore, people didn't get white hair until they were ready for 'old age sleep'—very old people sleep most of the time—yet now one sees middle-aged and even younger people with gray hair like the whites have."

Status and Treatment of the Aged

It was believed that a person who had lived to a ripe old age had been privileged to do so by the Supreme Being. Therefore, they reasoned, if you are good to old people, these in turn will pray to the Supreme Being for your health, long life, and success. Children were instructed explicitly to be good to the aged,—to feed them, to clothe them, and to help them in difficulties,—as well as to seek out those so blessed and ask for their prayers. It was

[1] Allowance should of course be made for the fact that "old age" is a relative term. When it was said that young men were urged to marry "older experienced women," this referred to a woman of perhaps twenty to twenty-five. See pp. 171–72. A woman on the northern plains was "old" at forty, according to Denig, p. 513.